

Education Committee, Public Hearing

February 20, 2017

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Representative Ziobron and honorable Members of the Committee, my name is Mary Cecchinato and I am the Executive Director of the Torrington Child Care center ,Inc. and a member of the State Funded Child Development Centers Director's Forum representing 103 state funded child care centers throughout Connecticut serving approximately 4000 young children and infants.

I am submitting testimony regarding the Governor's proposed budget, H.B. 7027 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

Restore cuts to the Office of Early Childhood: The OEC Budget of \$304 million only accounts for **1.6% of the \$18 billion dollar budget**; the proposed cuts disproportionately cut critical programs to children and families. Restore the cuts to these programs.

Maintain Birth to Three in the Office of Early Childhood: The mission of the Office of Early Childhood, established in 2012, is to develop a coordinated system of programs and services for children and families to support and ensure children grow and thrive. Before the establishment of the OEC, programs were scattered in many agencies with no common goals, objectives or outcomes. Advocates joined with Governor Malloy and the Legislature to establish the Office with a shared vision of enhanced services to children including quality early care and education, early developmental intervention, home visitation services, family support and community partnerships. We believe the proposed budget undermines and devastates this promise to Connecticut's children and families.

Restore Adequate Funding to Care4Kids: The proposed cuts to the child care subsidy program for working families, Care4Kids, is particularly counterintuitive to the goals of prosperity and opportunity echoed in the Governor's budget address. Care4Kids is the foundation of funding for low and moderate income working families. The Federal and State Government investment in quality child care since 1970 has enabled thousands of families to work and feel assured that their children are being cared for in safe, quality child care programs.

The Child Care Industry in Connecticut is dependent on this funding stream for its sustainability and ability to continue to serve families and children. Care4Kids is the largest child care subsidy program for low income working families in Connecticut helping over 70,000 families. Recent cuts to the program dramatically impact parent's ability to access child care and put at risk thousands of small businesses who depend on Care4Kids income to operate their child care programs. We believe affordable, quality child care is just as important as a robust transportation system to a thriving economy.

Rethink state spending and tax policies: We fully understand the difficult budget decisions facing the legislature. We join with families throughout Connecticut to urge the Legislature to

think strategically about fundamental changes to budget spending and revenue choices. Our state budget should not balance its finances on the backs of children and struggling working families. We urge you to consider cross sector priorities and ask yourself, how do decisions impact children and families? **Think Children First!**

1. Modernize the outdated sales tax system that now has \$6 billion dollars' worth of exemptions; for example, lower the sales tax to 4% and eliminate most exemptions except food and clothing.
2. Review and prioritize business tax credits that currently stand at \$7 billion dollars. The continuous shrinkage of taxpayers actually paying taxes is a fundamental flaw in the tax system.
3. Aggressively pursue an initiative to develop new federal and state funding to be allocated for this important subsidy that supports stable child care and employment for thousands of children and their families.
4. Target TANF funds to Care4Kids that currently are allocated to DCF
5. Allow interagency transfer of funds from large accounts like Medicaid to offset defficits.
6. Reinstate line items in the budget to ensure transparency of program allocations

The State faces significant revenue shortfalls. Spending and revenue priorities will have to be made. So little of the State Budget supports children and families now that these cuts are truly irrational and against strong scientific research that proves that investments in early childhood garner significant cost savings down the road. We need budget and spending priorities that promote cohesive, thoughtful policies that benefit all sectors of our society. Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.

Sincerely,

Mary Cecchinato

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